



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO • DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND LAND USE

DATE: May 30, 2008

TO: Planning Commission

SUBJECT: PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE; DISTRICT: All

SUMMARY:

Overview

In the summer of 2007, efforts on the General Plan Update were disrupted by the turnover of the executive management within the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) that oversaw the project. The new executive management performed an assessment of the project to determine its status and a recommended approach for its completion. Implementation of the new strategy for project completion began in September 2007 with the appointment of a full-time dedicated project manager to the General Plan Update project. This report provides a summary of the progress that has been made since September 2007. Additionally, it presents major issues associated with the project that have been identified during the past several months and provides an opportunity for the public and Planning Commission to provide comments on the project as it progresses.

Recommendation(s)

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & LAND USE

Receive this report.

Fiscal Impact

N/A

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

The General Plan Update is served by two advisory committees: the Steering Committee and the Interest Group. Multiple meetings have been held with both these committees since September 2007. Meeting minutes are available on the DPLU General Plan Update website: <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/committees.html>.

Involved Parties

The County of San Diego is considered the applicant. The General Plan Update will apply to all lands that are under the land use jurisdiction of the County of San Diego.

BACKGROUND:

The project assessment of the General Plan Update conducted in the summer of 2007 by the new executive management generally concluded that the state of the project did not correspond with

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basic expectations related to its overall completeness and schedule. Although there had been substantial progress and achievements to that date, much remained to be completed. As a result, completion of the General Plan Update and the associated environmental impact report (EIR) was concluded to require approximately three additional years. This estimate assumed that Community Plan updates and the majority of implementing regulations and policies would be completed on a separate schedule extending several years into the future. The assessment also found the need to a new strategy that related both to the management of the project and to the completion of the project documents. Efforts on implementing this new strategy and continuing with the General Plan Update started in earnest in September 2007 with the appointment of a full-time dedicated project manager.

PROJECT PROGRESS:

Since September 2007, significant progress has been made on the General Plan Update as described below. The project remains on schedule with a project decision anticipated for Fall 2010.

Hiring a Planning and Environmental Consultant

DPLU has contracted with a planning and environmental consultant to assist with the completion of the General Plan Update and the associated EIR. A qualifications based selection process consistent with Board Policy F-40 (Procuring Architectural, Engineering and Related Professional Services) was used to select the consultant. The Request for Statements of Qualifications was noticed from September to October 2007 and the contract with the selected consultant was executed at the beginning of January 2008. The consultant selected is PBS&J, a well respected nationwide firm with substantial California general planning and EIR experience. Some of their current and past General Plan projects include the following counties and cities: Sutter, Riverside, Sacramento, Beverly Hills, Simi Valley, Brea, Newport Beach, Inglewood, Corona, and Pomona. Mr. Kim Howlett will serve as the Project Director. Mr. Howlett has over 30 years of experience in the San Diego region with planning and environmental projects. Services related to the General Plan Update will be directed by Elwood "Woody" Tescher. Mr. Tescher has over 30 years of experience with urban planning and design throughout California. He is recognized for state-of-the-art development and application of planning and design and he is a frequent instructor for UCLA general planning and urban design courses.

Stakeholder Reengagement

In September 2007, over 18 months had passed since the last advisory group meeting on the General Plan Update. General dissemination of project information to the stakeholders and public had also decreased. Reengagement of project stakeholders – the advisory groups, community planning/sponsor groups, and the public – was considered a necessity for the successful completion of the project. This posed a challenge to staff which had been reduced in number by over 50 percent to accommodate hiring of the consultant. Nevertheless, during the eight months that have passed since September 2007, nine meetings with the Steering Committee and Interest Group have been held.

Additionally, from January to April 2008, General Plan Update staff attended 26 Community and Sponsor Group Meetings to provide first-hand update on the project and to reiterate the County's

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commitment to the completion of project and to including stakeholders and the public in the process. The General Plan Update staff have also launched a monthly e-newsletter to provide ongoing updates on the project to interested individuals. In coordination with the e-newsletter, the project website is kept up-to-date with the latest project announcements, land use map alternatives, and other relevant documents and information.

Project Work Plan and Schedule

Through negotiations with the consultant, a detailed work plan and schedule have been developed for the completion of the General Plan Update. The detailed work plan provides specific direction to the consultant and staff as to the tasks that require completion. Timing and critical milestones associated with those tasks are identified and illustrated in a project schedule. As shown in the project schedule, public review of the EIR is anticipated for late 2009 and hearings for approval of the project would be in the fall of 2010. The project schedule has been presented to the advisory groups, community planning/sponsor groups, and the public. It is posted on the website and project progress will be tracked using the schedule to clearly demonstrate staff's commitment to it.

General Plan Element Preparation

The consultant's first task was to review all documents that were under preparation for the General Plan. Those reviews were completed in March 2008. Following these reviews, preparation of the General Plan elements follows a process that was developed as part of the project work plan. That process consists of completing initial drafts of the elements and then coordinating with internal and external specialist for their review and input. Once all elements have completed technical review, a consolidated draft document will be assembled for review by the advisory groups. At the time of this report, technical review on four of the six elements was well underway.

Land Use Map Alternatives

In September 2007, two land use maps had been endorsed by the Board of Supervisors – a Referral Map and a Draft Land Use Map. As a result, there was uncertainty over how these two maps would be evaluated in the EIR and what role they would serve in the ultimate approved project. Recognizing the importance of alternatives to an EIR and the requirements under State law to evaluate a range of alternatives, staff focused on developing a comprehensive plan for handling alternatives. Based on coordination with the consultant, and consideration of State law and relevant court cases, staff came to two fundamental conclusions regarding the land use map alternatives. First, the Referral Map needed to be the Proposed Project for the EIR because the Draft Land Use Map accommodated less development than the Referral Map, thus decreasing environmental impacts. This was also appropriate because the Referral Map has been created at the specific direction of the Board of Supervisors. Second, additional alternatives were needed for consideration in the EIR to provide for a range as required by law.

As a result of this second conclusion, staff prepared two additional land use map alternatives – a Hybrid Map and an Environmentally Superior Map. Both of these alternatives were prepared solely by staff and are not intended to trump either of the Board-endorsed maps. However, they

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are intended to support the environmental analysis and better inform decision-making. Ultimately, it is possible that they may affect the project that is approved by the Board.

The Hybrid Map strikes a balance between the Referral Map and the Draft Land Use Map. It includes the Housing Element site, the road network land use changes, and the other refinements to the map. It also incorporates the Referral Map changes that meet the project objectives and reflect the policy direction of the draft Regional Elements. The Environmentally Superior Alternative reflects a more stringent application of the mapping concepts that were applied to create the other maps and is more aggressive in restricting growth in portions of the Semi-Rural and the Rural Lands Regional Categories. The Environmentally Superior Alternative may be modified if the EIR analysis identifies areas of significant impacts where changes in land use can reduce or alleviate the impact.

Preparation of the two additional alternatives required a tremendous effort from planning and GIS staff. Each community area required specific attention and every deviation from the Board-endorsed maps was tracked. The two alternatives are now complete, as are additional graphics and tables that help explain how these alternatives differ from the others.

With the completion of these alternatives, modeling and analysis that will support the EIR has begun. A number of scenarios are being analyzed, including: the Existing Conditions, the No Project (Existing General Plan Build Out), the Proposed Project (Referral Map), the Draft Land Use Map, the Hybrid Map, the Environmentally Superior Map, and Cumulative Projects.

Environmental Impact Report Preparation

As described above, the technical analysis that is required for the EIR has begun. Because it is part of the critical path for the overall project schedule, timely completion of the technical analysis is crucial. Progress is also being made on other parts of the EIR to ensure that the schedule is adhered to. To date, the consultant has completed initial drafts of the Interim Report for several EIR sections. The Interim Report consists of existing conditions information and the overall format and approach for the remainder of the document. The Interim Report allows for early coordination between staff and the consultant for early identification and resolution of issues associated with the preparation of a voluminous and highly complex document.

Draft Project Objectives/Guiding Principles

Project objectives are required for the EIR and serve as the basis for developing and reviewing project alternatives. In anticipation of the EIR analysis, staff has developed draft project objectives for use in the EIR. Staff intends for these objective to be included in the General Plan as guiding principles. The objectives are based on project concepts and mapping principles that have been presented and discussed in the past. The draft Project Objectives/Guiding Principles are:

1. Support a reasonable share of projected regional population growth.
2. Reduce land consumption and promote sustainability by locating new development near existing infrastructure, services, and jobs.

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3. Reinforce the vitality, local economy, and individual character of existing communities while balancing housing, employment, and recreational opportunities.
4. Promote environmental stewardship that protects the range of natural resources and habitats that uniquely define the County's character and ecological importance.
5. Ensure that development accounts for physical constraints and the natural hazards of the land.
6. Provide and support a multi-modal transportation network that enhances connectivity and supports community development patterns.
7. Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.
8. Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network.
9. Minimize public costs of infrastructure and services and correlate their timing with new development.
10. Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus.

PROJECT ISSUES:

Several issues have been identified by staff that relate to project logistics and stakeholder perception. Staff believes that it is best to identify and communicate these issues early so that a unified understanding about the project and the strategy for completion can be achieved.

Land Use Designations

The proposed land use designations and maps associated with the General Plan Update remain a major area of controversy. None of the maps (Referral, Hybrid, Draft, and Environmental) can clearly be said to be the favorite because opinions vary greatly between individuals and groups. To complicate the issue, most individuals and groups seem to be focused on particular areas and properties. For example, while a group may generally be supportive of one of the maps, there may be a handful of properties with designations that are not supported. This undercuts their support and often results in full opposition to a map. To aid in the process of selecting the final land use map, staff has inventoried all mapping differences between the Referral, Hybrid, and Draft maps. Tables and maps are used to describe these differences and are available on the project website. Further, staff will be evaluating each of these differences for planning and environmental considerations and presenting the findings with the EIR. This analysis will be used to solicit public input and will also be used to inform decision making.

Following public review of the EIR, staff will develop a recommendation for the final land use map based on public input and the environmental analysis. The Planning Commission may agree or disagree with the staff recommendation, and may also formulate their own recommendation. These recommendations and the ultimate land use map approved by the Board of Supervisors do not need to mirror one of the alternatives evaluated in the EIR. If necessary, they may be a combination of the maps or some other deviation. However, the resulting land use map must be

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adequately analyzed by the EIR so any substantial deviation from one of the evaluated maps would likely require additional time and effort for analysis.

Conservation Subdivision Program

The Conservation Subdivision Program is a component of the General Plan Update that has gained a substantial amount of interest over the past several years. In general, the program is intended to facilitate compact residential design (such as clustering) in order to set aside areas of open space. The open space is intended to preserve natural resources and/or agriculture. Considerable effort has been put forth to develop a program; however, the latest version of that program lacked the support of numerous stakeholders. Additionally, staff had concerns over its complexity and implementation. Staff is now working on simplifying the program and plans to present a concept to the advisory groups in late June 2008. Staff's approach to this revision includes the following concepts:

- **Moving away from a blind "stick and carrot" approach to a resource driven one** – Meaning that clustering is not applied because one is required to do it or because of an incentive like a density bonus; it is implemented because the resources on the property support it.
- **Removing density reduction and density bonus allowances** – The previous versions of the program relied on a complex system of density reductions for steep slopes, wetlands, floodways, and floodplains; and density bonuses for clustering as an incentive. Implementation of these concepts would complicate the process, increase costs, increase processing time, and result in greater disagreements between staff, consultants, and applicants.
- **Leveraging existing programs and regulations** – The existing Zoning Ordinance contains mechanisms that allow for compact residential design (Planned Residential Developments and Lot Area Averaging). By improving upon these mechanisms and providing additional regulations that guide and promote their use, the same goals can be achieved in an easier and more efficient manner.

Equity Mechanisms

On June 25, 2003 (2), the Board of Supervisors endorsed the concept of developing an equity mechanism (such as Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program) to help preserve a landowner's equity position in their property. The concept was investigated further by staff and the Interest Group in 2003 and 2004 and an update was provided to the Board of Supervisors in May 19, 2004 (1). Since then, there has been minimal communication on this issue which has resulted in varying expectations and assumptions among stakeholders.

As this time, staff's efforts with regard to developing an equity mechanism is limited to a purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) program. This program is currently under development on a separate but parallel track to the General Plan Update. A PACE program, considered a PDR program, is a voluntary farmland protection technique that

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compensates landowners for voluntarily limiting future development on their land. Landowners retain many property rights according to the provisions specified in the easement and the right to farm. An easement separates certain land use rights—primarily development as nonagricultural land—and conveys them to another party. PACE programs enable landowners to sell development rights on their land to a government agency or nongovernmental organization, such as a land trust, while retaining full ownership. The program may be coordinated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmland Protection Program which may be a source of additional funding and technical assistance.

Community Plans, Zoning, and Other Project Components

There are numerous other components of the General Plan Update project and its implementation such as community plans, zoning, board policies, ordinances, procedures, etc. Similar to the equity mechanism, there appears to be varying expectations and assumptions among stakeholders with regard to these components and the timing for their completion. The following is a brief summary of their status:

- **Community Plans** – Community plans are a critical component of the General Plan Update because they provide community specific information and policy direction. Additionally, they are adopted as part of the General Plan and therefore must comply with applicable State law and consistency requirements. Updates to the community plans are required and staff is working with the Steering Committee to develop a standard template and schedule for the updates. The community plan updates will need to occur on a separate but parallel track to the General Plan Update. It is very possible that several communities will not be able to update their community plans by the time that the General Plan Update is taken forward for approval. In the case of these communities, an interim solution will be necessary. Staff will be working with the planning consultant and the Steering Committee and possibilities for such a solution.
- **Zoning and other Components** – There are numerous other components to the General Plan Update that are important to its implementation. Limited work has begun on these components; however, a comprehensive list and work plan for their completing is under development. In order to assure that the General Plan Update remains on schedule, staff's focus will stay with General Plan itself. However, staff is also committed to timely execution of these associated components of the General Plan.

WAIVERS AND EXCEPTIONS:

N/A

ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS:

A Program Environmental Impact Report will be prepared for the General Plan Update and its various components. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) soliciting input on the scope of the EIR was issued first in 2002 and again recently from April 28, 2008 to May 28, 2008. A copy of the NOP is available on the project website:

http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/docs/gpupdate_nop.pdf.

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PREVIOUS ACTIONS:

A Director's Report was provided to the Planning Commission on October 19, 2007, briefly describing the project status. History on other previous Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors hearings is available on the project website:

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/hearing.html>.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT APPROPRIATE PERMITS:

N/A

PUBLIC INPUT:

Input from the public and Community Planning and Sponsor Groups specific to this progress report was not requested. Recent input received at Steering Committee and Interest Group meetings can be found in the meeting minutes which are available on the project website:

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/committees.html>.

DEPARTMENT REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

This progress report is intended to be an informational item. Therefore, no action is necessary.

cc: All Community Planning/Sponsor Groups

Interested Parties (via email)

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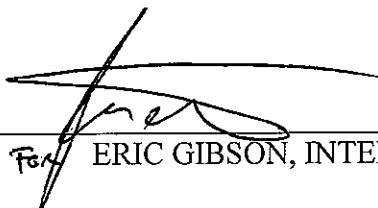
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